

THE OLD BACK STAIR.

Of all the spots of childhood
I know of none so rare
As sitting down the banisters
Of the old back stair.

I remember well the scene.
And the fun used to bring
While waiting for the ride
A-riding round the ring.
Was this play all attraction
Could never near compare
With sitting down the banisters
Of the old back stair.

Then I recollect the hour left,
Checked full of clever say,
Mother used to send us there
To pass a rainy day.
But I often came away from that
And with mother wasn't there,
So sitting down the banisters
Of the old back stair.

I have grown into manhood now,
And often wonder how
The old folks always welcome me—
They're glad to have me come.
But while they're not looking
I'm tempted, I declare,
To slide down the banisters
Of the old back stair.

—Clarence H. Edwards, in Kansas City Journal.

A STRANGE VOICE.

Why Two Railroad Men Broke Open a Trunk.

Between the stories of Conductor Tom Pope and Sandy McTougal, backed by Sandy McTougal's friends, one gets a pretty good idea of Sandy's remarkable adventure with a voice, or, as Sandy terms it, with the devil in a box.

Tom Pope is conductor and McTougal is baggage-master on the Air line, which runs from the Atlantic ocean to "the middle of next week."

"Most astonishing thing that I have seen of Sandy's for a voice," said the conductor the other night.

Then Tom narrates, and very prettily, too, how he and Sandy were transferred to night runs in August last, and how lonely the baggage-master became because he was cut off from fellows to listen to his stories and offer him cigars.

"You allers smoked 'em, Tom," interrupted Sandy. "I don't smoke, ye know."

"I did get a good many puffs that way, I'll admit," said the conductor. "They were about the only thing Sandy ever gave that I could get any light out of."

"Are you telling this story?" asks McTougal. "I, so, tell it."

"Sandy was lonely and miserable," continued his friend. "Nobody talked to him or gave him a quarter for not smoking their baggage, so he took to brown studies and naps between stations. The night of his voice business—"

"Devil, I tell you," cries Sandy abruptly.

"Was a crowded one," continues Pope, without noting the interruption. "His was jam full of luggage."

"And the more trucks Sandy has on board the crosser he gets. There was a camp meeting on a switch-off track, and at the junction I picked up a lot of noisy passengers who were leaving for other places of amusement, and there was no end of trucks."

"McTougal got things into shape about eleven o'clock, I reckon, and as there's a part of the run where it's a good hour between stations, he got ready for a snooze."

"He picked out the softest truck in the pile on which to pillow his head, tilted back his chair with his feet on the rounds, pulled his hat over his face and went to sleep. How's that, Mac?"

"Quite keener," responds the baggage-master.

"Very well, then you tell it for awhile. I wasn't there, you know."

"It didn't seem as if I'd been asleep more than a minute," begins Sandy, "when there was a lively jump of the car and I sort of came to life with a jerk. At the same time I heard, as if by way off, a noise like some one a-talking."

"But I thought 'twas a brakeman outside, and 'twas 'jes a-dozin' off again when right at my ear, in a thin, sharp voice, 'satin' said: 'Oh, Lord!'

"I ain't no fool, I ain't," Sandy asserts, throwing back his head, defiantly, "when that tin whisper comes into my ear I feel half opened my eyes, 'satin' to see some of the boys around. But not a livin' thing was visible."

"So I said to myself, 'I sored; that's what's the matter,' and off I goes a-sinkin' in dreamin'."

"Then again I hears that voice. It says, quite distinctly: 'I want to get out!'

"In the midst of life we are in death."

"I janked my head round, and didn't see nothin' that wasn't there before. That threw me off my pins."

"Then a rooster crowed, and a feller, with a cold in his nose, counted ten forward and then backward, and another came, with a bullfro voice, ordered me to 'Wake up! the devil wants you!'

"You needn't laugh, gentlemen, when I tell you I ran, and I told you if you'd been there, I was certain the devil had come for me—late but sure—an! I didn't wait for him to ask for my ticket."

Tom Pope at this point broke into a stentorian laugh.

"If, gentlemen, you'd seen Sandy come dling into the car where I was sitting, you would never stop laughing. You may not believe it, but his brown face was as white as your shirt collar, and his eyes were as big as billiard balls. He dashed down the aisle and whispered in my ear:

"'Tom! Tom! come with me!'

"'What's the matter, Mac?' I said. 'What ails you?'

"'Tom, the devil's in my car. He's been a-cutting up for half an hour, and I'm most crazy. If you're my friend come with me!'

"He wasn't drunk, because he doesn't drink. It wasn't religious enthusiasm, because Sandy has no religion."

"I almost believe he meant what he said, and that he had been called for. I got up in a hurry and followed him."

"I hadn't more than got inside the baggage car when, from among the trunks, something sung out: 'Shut that door and pull down your vest!'

"Sandy wanted to fight, then," continued Tom. "He danced around that car like a prize-fighter in the ring."

"'Pshaw!' I said, 'that's a boxed-up parrot!'

"'An' then the parrot told you you lied,' asserted McTougal."

"'Yes!' says Tom, cheerfully. 'And then you said—do you remember what you said?'

"'No, Mac; but wasn't I at your side when we got into the next coach a second later?'

"'We came back with two brakemen,' McTougal remarked, continuing. 'One of them brakemen looked on top of the car, and under it, an' in it. He stuck to it that there was a ventriloquist about, but gave that idea up when he couldn't find nobody.'"

"We lunged those trunks right and left in a lively style," observed Pope, "but not a thing did we discover—no human living or dead thing—not a place from which the noise came."

"We were puzzled, you may believe, and if the search had stopped there the road might have warehoused that coach, for no railroad man would have traveled in a car that was haunted."

"But the end came. While we were looking into each others' faces, and frightened in being blocked in that sort of way the voice spoke again. It said very distinctly: 'Let me out! I am dying—dying!'

"It was under my arm the voice was," Sandy exclaimed, "in a big trunk that had come from camp-meeting. I sung out for Jake to run for a doctor if there was one on the train an' Tom an' me put that trunk on the floor as gently as if 'twas glass."

"'Twat light enough. We thought the poor thing must be almost a skeleton. I got hold of the sledge hammer. 'Keep up your courage, ma'am,' I shouted, 'an' we'll have you out in a jiffy.'"

"You should see Sandy at that moment," said Pope, enthusiastically. "He looked like a hero, every inch of him. He gave that hammer four sweeping swings. Crash! crash! Rip! tear! Off came the top, and it was flung clean across the car. A pile of light, daisy duff followed."

"A dozen faces looked anxiously in so that trunk, expecting to see the body of a dying or dead woman. Sandy seemed beside himself with anxiety."

"We crowded around the trunk and the doctor knelt down beside it."

The training band was instantly called out and my brother, that was next older than I, was the one that was selected. He did not return till late at night when we were all in bed. When I rose in the morning I found my mother in tears, who informed me that my brother John was to march next day after to-morrow at sunrise. My father was in Boston in the Massachusetts assembly. Mother said that though John was supplied with summer clothes he must suffer for winter garments. There were at this time no stores and no articles to be had except such as each family could make itself. The sight of mother's tears always brought all the hidden strength of body and mind into action. I instantly asked what garment was needed. She replied: "Pantaloon." "Oh, if that is all," said I, "I will spin and weave him a pair before he goes."

"But," said mother, "the wool is on the sheep's back and the sheep are in the pasture." I immediately turned to a younger brother and bade him take the salt dish and call them to the yard. Mother replied: "Poor child, there are no sheep shears within three miles and a half."

"I have some small shears at the loom," said I. "But you can't spin and weave in so short a time." "I am certain we can, mother," "How can you weave there is a long web of linen in the loom."

By this time the sound of the sheep made me quicken my steps toward the yard. I requested my sister to bring the wheel and carls while I went for the wool. I went to the yard with my brother and secured a white sheep, from which I sheared with my loom shears half enough for a web. We then let her go with the rest of her fleece. I sent the wool in by little sister and Luther ran for a black sheep and held her while I cut wool off for my filling and half the warp, and then we allowed her to go with the remaining coarse part of the fleece. The rest of the narrative the writer would abridge by saying that the wool thus obtained was duly carded, spun, washed, sized and dried. A loom was found a few doors off the web "got in" and was wove, the cloth prepared, cut and made two or three hours before the brother's departure, that is to say, in forty hours from the commencement, without help from any modern improvement.

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and again the feminine headgear was perceived to be in motion. The young man turned pale and his tongue did cleave to the roof of his mouth. Like one suffering with nightmare, he wanted to scream, but could not. All the time the lady's hat kept moving in a peculiar way. The young man kept his gaze on the hat—for some reason unknown to himself he could not do otherwise. Presently he saw one side of the hat raise up; then a pair of sharp, bright eyes peered out. The next instant out from under the hat jumped a mouse. It landed upon the pale young clerk's shoulder and he ran into the street yelling like a Comanche.

"Ugh! what was that?" screamed the lady.

"It was a mouse, and he jumped out of your hat," answered the pale young clerk between his chattering teeth.

And so it was. The lady had taken up her hat carelessly, put it on and worn it to the store. On the way, she said, she felt something moving in her hat, but thought it was the breeze moving in her hair. She was greatly surprised at the developments, but not so frightened as the pale young clerk.

The CONSCRIPTION PLAN.

A Law That Lessens More to a Nation Than Is Gained by It.

When the gain of what is termed a whole nation under arms is estimated, the exaggeration of the pompous phrases hides the nakedness of the fact that large numbers of young men are lost to their country by the means to which they resort to escape military service.

In Italy and Germany, says the Fortnightly Review, these may be counted by legions; in France men are less numerous, because men are more wedded to the native soil, and take to service more easily and more naturally, but in Italy and Germany thousands flock to immigrant ships, thus choosing life-long self-expatriation, and every year, as the military and fiscal burdens grow heavier, will lead away by preference to lands where, however hard be the work, the dreaded voice of the drill sergeant cannot reach them, and they can "call their souls their own."

Patriotism is a fine quality, no doubt, but it does not accord with the chill and supercilious apathy which characterizes the general temper and teaching of this age, and a young man may be pardoned if he deem that his country is less a mother worthy of love than a cruel and unworthy stepmother, when she demands three of the fairest years of his life to be spent in a barracks yard and wrings his ears till the blood drops from them or beats him about the head with the butt of a musket, because he does not hold his chin high enough or shift his feet quickly enough.

A Villainous Business.

One of the most prosperous industries in Paris is the sale and disposal of horse-flesh for food. There are in the city of Paris 180 shops for the sale of horse-flesh, and in the course of this year more than 21,000 horses, 61 mules and 275 donkeys have been killed and eaten by the Parisians. The most singular point about this traffic is that the price of the flesh is equal to that of good beef, 30 cents a pound. It is only fair, however, to add that two-thirds of this meat has been converted into sausages, so that it is more than possible that the consumers are ignorant of the source of their toothsome dish. It is now easy to understand how it is that good horses are so scarce in the Paris stables; at 20 cents a pound a fat horse would be worth more when he was dead than alive.

Old Time Vessels.

In the American navy there are now but eleven of the old-fashioned wooden vessels in active service. They are the Ranger, Alert, Marion, Lancaster, Mohican, Yantic, Thetis, Kearsarge, Alliance, Adams and Essex. These will rapidly go out of commission as new steel vessels are accepted. The Pennsylvania is to be sold, being already out of commission. Her sale will be followed by this government's disposing of the Omaha, Iroquois and other old timbers.

Changing Around.

"Caroline, last year you gave me a box of cigars for a Christmas present."

"Yes, George."

"This year suppose you let me give you a box of cigars."

"Very well, and I'll get you a seal-skin sack!"—Puck.

A Pointed Suggestion.

He—Your voice has such a beautiful ring to it!

She—Maybe; but my finger hasn't—Judge.

A Study in Phonetics.

"Want to buy a tricycle?"

"No; want to try a bicyclo."—Jury.

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Are guaranteed to cure Bilious Attacks, Sick Headache, La Grippe, Colds, Liver Complaint and Constipation. 40 in each bottle. Price 25 cents. Sold by druggists. Picture "7, 17, 70" and sample dose free. J. F. SMITH & CO., Prop., NEW YORK.

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